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ABSTRACT

Described are aspects of the Avance Educational Programs for Parents and Children, a non-profit, community-based organization in San Antonio, Texas, with the general goal of strengthening and supporting low income Hispanic families. Introductory remarks focus on the organization's goals, target population, funding, and services. Subsequent to a personal account of the author's involvement in parenting education, discussion focuses on the implementation of the first Avance Program in Dallas and the replication of the Avance Neighborhood Intervention program in San Antonio. Modifications of the program across 12 years of operation are described, as are the program's involvement in other programs, conferences, and materials development activities; dissemination and public relations activities; and awards, recognition, and accomplishments attained by the program. Concluding remarks focus on the program's funding history, the characteristics of a successful parenting program, and future directions of the Avance program. (RH)

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AVANCE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ITS TWELVE YEAR EVOLVEMENT

Gloria G. Rodriguez

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AVANCE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ITS TWELVE YEAR EVOLVEMENT

I. Abstract

The Avance Educational Programs for Parents and Children is a non-profit community based organization in San Antonio, Texas. It has been in existence for twelve years helping to strengthen and support low income Hispanic families.

This document contains background information on the agency's goals, target population, funding and services. It also presents a personal account of how the agency was first implemented in Dallas and then in San Antonio, Texas. A historical perspective traces the growth and development of the agency, as well as significant factors and events which have contributed to its success.

THE AVANCE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ITS TWELVE YEAR EVOLVEMENT

II. Introduction

A. GOALS

The Avance Educational Programs for Parents and Children, legally known as Avance-San Antonio, Inc., is a private non-profit community based organization whose purpose is to strengthen and support the family unit.

Avance was implemented in San Antonio, Texas in 1973 for the purpose of: 1) promoting and conducting research for the advancement of human knowledge and the alleviation of human suffering 2) providing direct services whereby: a) parents and children can realize their fullest potential b) the economic conditions of the family are stabilized and enhanced c) the prevention and alleviation of the following psycho/social problems can be effected — illiteracy, poor school performance, high drop-out rate, teenage pregnancy, child abuse and neglect, mental health problems (poor self esteem, isolation, depression), substance abuse, crime and violence, poverty and government dependency. Avance is a Spanish word meaning "advancement, progress".

B. TARGET POPULATION

Avance serves predominantly low-income Hispanic families on the south and west sides of San Antonio, Texas. The primary participants are the mother and her children. Services are provided in three centers located in or adjacent to a federally funded housing

project. Ninety-three percent (93%) of the population is Mexican-American, the majority being third generation immigrants. A 1980 survey of the Avance catchment area indicated that fifty three and eight tenths percent (53.8%) of the women were either separated, widowed, divorced or single; eighty-five percent (85%) of the respondents reported having no occupation, the remaining fifteen percent (15%) held unskilled or semiskilled positions. The mean monthly income for the families surveyed was \$473.00. Many parents were abused as children, lacked knowledge and skills in child growth and development, had few support systems and experienced continuous economic and social pressures. There was a seventy seven percent (77%) high school drop-out rate among the parents. The program serves two parent families, single parents, teen parents, AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) recipients, high risk and abused/neglected children. The age of the participants range from 15 to 69 with a mean age of 32. The mean family size is 6.1 members.

In order to qualify for the parenting program, families must have a child under four years of age, be from the community, and both parent and child must participate. To be enrolled in the academic and economic development component, parents must have completed the 10 month parenting program. Although no fees are charged, families must contribute volunteer hours, such as in clerical, craft, fundraising, or child care assistance. Potential participants are introduced to the program by word of mouth and by a bi-annual door-to-door outreach campaign. Avance accepts referrals from other service providers, and case management for "Priority 1" child abuse cases is coordinated with the State Department of Human Services.

C. FUNDING

The annual budget for 1984-85 was \$420,000 of which 47% came from the City of San Antonio Human Services Department, 20% from the United Way, 12% from the State Department of Human Services, 19% from the federal government and 2% from the private sector. Initial funding was a \$100,000 grant from the Zale Foundation, which solely funded the Avance organization for three years and partially for the three subsequent years. Avance has to apply for refunding annually and extensive programmatic and fiscal evaluations are conducted by the funding agencies. There are aggressive efforts for obtaining additional funding to replace the lost revenue due to massive federal cutbacks in social services as well as to the termination of demonstration projects. Avance has held two major fundraising gala events to establish an endowment fund.

D. SERVICES

Avance is very comprehensive in scope. The agency ran the following separate programs for 1984-85: a) two Parent-Child Education Programs serving a minimum of 120 parents and 150 children on a monthly basis b) Educational Opportunities and Economic Development Program serving 395 individuals c) The Avance Homebound Child Abuse Project serving 27 families d) Two Parent/Teen Projects funded by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect and the National Office on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention through COSSMHO serving 100 families e) Exercise and Arts and Craft Classes serving 141 individuals.

The Parent-Child Education Program seeks to familiarize participants with the basic social, emotional, physical and cognitive needs of young children in a practical and supportive manner. It also provides assistance, information, and support to parents for the purpose of alleviating problems and obstacles that may impede the improvement of effective parenting skills. The parents form their own social support network which provides sanctions for desirable behaviors. Weekly, three hour center-based activities are attended by the parents for ten months. Classes are held between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Tuesday through Friday with each class consisting of approximately 15 mothers and 45 children. The weekly classes cover 30 bilingual lessons in child growth and development, and toy making classes emphasizing learning through play. Special group field trips, picnics and parties are planned for parents and children. For example, Halloween is celebrated with a parade through the community in which mothers and children wear costumes and receive treats. During Thanksgiving, parents bring food items to have a turkey dinner to celebrate and give thanks together. At Christmas Santa distributes presents to all the children and Easter is funfilled with Easter egg hunts for the children and the breakage of cascarones for the adults. These activities strengthen the parent-child relationship; the social support network improves the self concept and teaches parents how to enjoy life with their children. These activities also give the parents a sense of belonging and a desire to participate and complete the program. Center-based group activities also include field trips to the public library. Transportation is provided to and from the center for clients residing with-

in assigned census tracts, and child care for their preschool children is also offered in the same facility. Each parent volunteers at least 12 times in the day care as required child care practicums. Third hour activities include outside speakers from different community resources informing the parents of their services.

During the 10 month program, the parents are visited in their homes twice a month for 30 minutes for an observation and video taping of parent-child play interactions. These tapes are discussed in the third hour center activities. One-to-one counseling is also offered to the parent.

The educational opportunities and economic development program, available to graduates of the parenting program, is designed to foster self-sufficiency among low-income minority women. Avance promotes economic stability and personal growth by providing on-site General Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D.), English as a Second Language (E.S.L.), and college classes and by facilitating job placement. In 1984, the first Avance graduate completed a 4 year college education degree and is now a school teacher in the community where she resides. College courses are first offered on-site and students are assisted in filling out financial aid forms. The students will later acquire the skills, gain confidence, and attend classes on campus. Workshops on personal development are also offered periodically.

The Avance Homebound Parenting Education Program is a support program for abusing parents with young children. Its goals are:

1. to provide a support system for families confirmed as child abuse and neglect cases through an individual program in the home
2. to prevent the re-occurrence of abuse and neglect by developing

more effective parenting practices and positive parental role attitudes. Services include: weekly visits, individualized parenting education classes in the home, social activities to break isolation, and a comprehensive program for meeting needs through service integration. The parents are mainstreamed to the center-based program when the family situation is stabilized and when the parent is ready for group interactions.

The Avance Concerned Parents National Demonstration Project is a two year project for addressing youth related problems, especially teen pregnancy. The goal of the project is to help prevent or reduce the incidence of adolescent premarital sexual activity by organizing parents of adolescents and providing experiences that will increase parental knowledge, attitudes, and skills relevant to limiting the problem.

The Parent-Teen Shared Interactions Model approaches prevention which is parent and teen oriented, rather than an isolated effort working with one group or the other. Group discussions are structured whereby information will be received to alleviate familial and social stressors commonly occurring during adolescence (curfew, dating, driving, smoking, drinking, drugs, premarital sexual activity, adult supervision, peer pressures, friendship, rejection/loss, failure and success). The program is designed to provide opportunities to enhance social skills and values clarification.

The programs that Avance sponsors under its umbrella are those that best respond to the needs of the low income Hispanic family. Even though the needs are similar to any disadvantaged group, regardless of race or ethnicity, the methodology is unique to this

particular population, taking into consideration dialects and culturally-based characteristics.

III. Personal account of writer's involvement in the field of parenting education

Gloria G. Rodriguez became involved in the field of parent education/family support in a desperate attempt to find a solution to the academic problems that many Hispanic children faced throughout the nation in 1970 and which today are still prevalent in many Hispanic communities. She became sensitized to this and other issues affecting low-income Hispanic families when she attended Our Lady of the Lake University from 1967-1970 with the assistance of a federally subsidized program entitled Project Teacher Excellence. The purpose of this program was to get low-income graduating students from various San Antonio "barrios" and offer them an opportunity to enter college to become bilingual teachers with the understanding that they would return to the "barrio" to teach.

Upon graduating from college in December of 1970, the writer became a bilingual teacher of a group of 35 first grade children who came from four classrooms and were considered to be so far behind the other children that retention had already been determined. According to the principal, the children had been labeled by their teachers as "retarded", "slow learners", and "uneducable". Initially, the writer strongly felt that the problem was between the monolingual Spanish speaking children and the English speaking teachers. However, it was soon evident that the children were not proficient in the Spanish nor the English language. They lacked the necessary foundation to help them meet

with academic success. The author worked extensively with these children for one and a half ($1\frac{1}{2}$) years and with another similar group the subsequent year. All but five of the children from the first group were promoted. Eventhough they did learn to read and write in both languages, it appeared that they could never "catch up" to the level of the children who entered school more prepared. While these children were learning concepts and prereadiness skills that they should have learned in their formative years, the children who had a stronger foundation were learning more advanced things and would be that much ahead. They were not going to be retained anymore, however, some would still be classified in the lower group, and the labeling would continue. The writer felt frustrated as a teacher because she did not have control over the children's environment before and after they were in her class.

It was in a graduate research class that the author stumbled onto the still pioneer concept of "parenting education". The concept was so logical: education begins at birth (and even before) and the first and most important teacher is the parent, especially during the child's critical formative years of 0-4. Effective parenting is learned and parents need assistance in this very critical profession.

The author enthusiastically conducted an attitudinal survey with the parents of the first group of children she taught to determine their

attitudes on child rearing and their desire and need for parenting education in that school district. The parents' responses reflected a strong need and desire for a parenting program. Contrary to teachers' expectations, the parents believed that learning begins at school; that the child's most important teacher is the first professional teacher the child will come in contact with, whether it's Head Start, Kindergarten, or first grade; and they believed that the basic role of the parent is to care for the children's physical needs. In addition, the parents had low academic aspirations for their children. When asked, "How far do you think your child will go to school: middle school, high school or college?", most parents replied, "probably middle school, maybe high school, but definitely not college."

Research indicates that the child's formative years of 0-4 are critical in the development of a strong learning foundation as well as the development of important values and the formation of one's personality. Many parents, as were those surveyed, do not realize their important role as teachers of their children. They all desire a better life for their children than they had, but feel it is beyond their control. Effective parenting is not easy; parents need training just as doctors, teachers and nurses do. How parents parent is largely left to chance - based on how they were parented as children. The school system needs to take aggressive action to reverse this and needs to be restructured to assist parents of children under 3 so that when the children enter school they will be better able to meet with success, then you will have the school

and home working harmoniously on behalf of the child. In this manner, current statistics on the high illiteracy rate and the disproportionately high drop out rate among Hispanics can be reduced. Otherwise, we will have the home doing or neglecting to do one thing, and the school assuming that the parents did their role in preparing the child - and in the end it is the child who will suffer. The child will be labeled, teased and ignored until he can tolerate it no longer, and at about the seventh or eighth grade, will drop out of school. With today's advanced technology, an education is critical in order to participate in the mainstream of society. Rather than having competent, independent, productive, contributing members of society, one will find a group of unhappy, isolated, dependent individuals who are at risk for such social problems as mental illness, family violence, crime, delinquency, teenage pregnancy, school drop out, and another generation of poverty.

The writer felt then, as she feels now, that parents need and desire help and support in their parenting role. Parents, then as they do now - twelve years later, want assistance in strengthening their family unit and in helping their children realize their fullest potential.

It was 1973 - when the writer was strongly committed to the philosophy of parenting education- that the second Avance Program was initiated in San Antonio, Texas , and when she became director.

The first Avance Program was implemented in 1972, the previous year, in Dallas, Texas.

IV. Implementation of First Avance Program - Dallas, Texas

The initial concept of the Avance Neighborhood Intervention Program originated in Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner's class at Cornell University in 1972. Bonnie Park, his doctoral student, submitted a funding proposal to the Zale Foundation for \$100,000 to operate the Avance Neighborhood Intervention Program which consisted of a Mother-Infant Program and a Tutor Program. Avance was a three year pilot project designed to develop and implement the Avance Program and to document the research findings.

It was Ann Willig, also a Cornell graduate student, who implemented the program in Dallas in a predominantly low-income Mexican-American community.

The Mother-Infant Program was a two year program in which the mother was the principle intervener of a child age 1 to 3 years. The parent and child would attend center based activities once a week for two hours and Avance staff members would go to the parents' home twice a month to video tape the mother-child dyad in a play situation.

The Tutoring Program was to be established the third year with a fifth grade child from the community working daily with the participating child on a one-to-one basis on prereadiness skills at the neighborhood school. The tutors were supervised by part-time college students who lived in the same neighborhood.

Other aspects of the Dallas site were: 1) the program was located in a modest house in a low-income Dallas community 2) the parents and tutors were paid a small stipend for their efforts 3) forty parents and children participated in the Mother-Infant Program 4) 40 Tutors and 6 part time college students were in the Tutoring Program and 5) 20 mothers and their children and 20 Tutors were to be part of the Control Group 6) the research component was not performed to the knowledge of the author.

V. Replication of Avance Neighborhood Intervention Program in San Antonio, Texas

The Avance program was so successful in Dallas the first year that Mr. William Zale, then President Emeritus of the Zale Corporation, recommended that a second Avance Program be implemented in San Antonio Texas. Ann Willig was sent to San Antonio to conduct interviews for the position of Director/Child Development Teacher.

The writer calls it Divine Providence that brought Ann Willig and her together, and she assumed the stated position on August 29, 1973. Gloria Rodriguez left her teaching job to implement Avance-Parent-Child Education Program in the Mirasol Housing Project which was located walking distance from where she was reared. She knew the people and the many problems that existed in the Housing project; she felt there was a great need there and that if it worked there, it could work anywhere. The program was located in two apartment units that were converted into offices, a classroom, a toymaking room, a room to care for the children and a kitchen.

It was extremely difficult to start a program from scratch. Ann Willig moved to San Antonio for a year returning to Dallas biweekly. Thereafter, she would visit San Antonio on a monthly basis. The writer recalls going door to door recruiting, and meeting some of her former classmates who had dropped out during middle school. Seventy-five parents with children ages eight months to one and a half years responded positively to the outreach effort of which fifty attended the first class in November. A new class of 8 was initiated in January, 1974; of the original 58 parents, twenty-five mothers and one father graduated from the two year parenting program. The staff consisted of 1) Director/Child Development Teacher/Home Visitor 2) Toy Instructor/Bus Driver 3) Program Assistant/Custodian and 4) Secretary /Bookkeeper.

The Tutoring Program began in July, 1974. Twenty five- 5th grade children from the same neighborhood tutored the young children who had graduated from the parenting program as it was done in Dallas. The tutors were trained and supervised by five college students from Our Lady of the Lake University. and the tutoring program was located at Las Palmas Elementary, the neighborhood school. Basically the San Antonio and Dallas sites were similar in utilizing the same curriculum.

In January, 1975, Dr. Michael Romaine, Director of the Zale Foundation asked Gloria Rodriguez to become Executive Director of the Avance Parenting Program. In March of that year, Gloria assumed the position and a local Board of Directors was established. This was the last year that full funding from the Zale Foundation would

be received in San Antonio and Dallas. In June of 1976, Avance-San Antonio received funding from the State Department of Human Services (then known as State Department of Public Welfare). The Tutor Program did not receive any funding and it was phased out in the San Antonio site. Unfortunately, the Dallas site was terminated. Avance will be forever indebted to the hard work and dedication of Ms. Ann Willig and the support of the Zale Foundation for without them Avance would not be here today.

VI. Program Modifications in the Course of Twelve Years

- 1) The Tutoring Program was eliminated. The Department of Public Welfare officials felt that it was similar to Head Start since the children were three and four years of age.
- 2) Day Care Center was Improved. Without the Tutoring Program, the writer felt it was imperative that the Avance Day Care Center be a developmental center rather than supervised play while the parents attended class. By calling it a Day Care Lab, the parents were required to volunteer 12 times in the Day Care as Day Care Practicums in order to receive a day care certificate and to graduate from the program. The day care was divided into infants, crawlers and toddlers. A child care food program was incorporated, serving the children a hot nutritious meal.
- 3) Stipend was eliminated Department of Public Welfare would not pay for the \$3 stipend. Fortunately, the program was already established and accepted in the community and this did not affect the program. Since the writer wasn't successful in raising the

the entire \$6,000 needed to continue the stipend, the Avance staff had to think of activities that gave the parents a sense of belonging and a desire to participate. The following activities were added to the program:

a) Parents and children participated in a Halloween parade led by the high school drum section and majorettes. The parents made costumes for themselves and their children. For the first time Avance received front page coverage in the local newspaper.

b) Parents donated a hot dish to celebrate Thanksgiving together.

c) Santa Claus gave the children fruit, sweets and a toy at the Avance Christmas Party which was sponsored by many organizations.

d) Easter was celebrated by having a big outing at the Zoo, an Easter Egg hunt, and a picnic at the City Park. Businesses donated all the goodies.

e) T-Shirts with Avance logo were sold to the parents at cost.

f) Graduates from the program were hired as staff members.

g) A King and Queen Contest was sponsored.

h) Avance had an elaborate graduation ceremony with flowers, caps and gowns, invitations, piano music, and relatives and friends attending.

i) Parents ordered Avance graduation rings.

4) Program curriculum was condensed from two years to one year.

The Mirasol Federal Housing Project is a very transient area where nearly half of the residents move out annually while the other half

have lived there for generations. This had an effect on the attrition rate. The retention rate in 1973 was 75% and 50% for 1974. Therefore, it was decided that in order to expose the parents to as much of the curriculum as possible, it was necessary to condense the curriculum material from two years to one year and to increase the duration of the classes from two hours to three hours. This change enabled Avance to add a new component whereby the parents familiarized themselves with resources and services available to them in the community.

5) Curriculum continued to be developed and field tested.

Topics and new toys were added to fit the needs and interests of the parents and children

6) Graduation Ceremony moved from the Blue Room at Our Lady of the Lake University to Thiry Auditorium accomodating 500 people. Children dress in caps and gown, receive a Golden Book, and parents receive a certificate of completion. All graduates from all Avance programs are recognized.

7) Number of staff increased from four (actually $3\frac{1}{2}$) to 26.

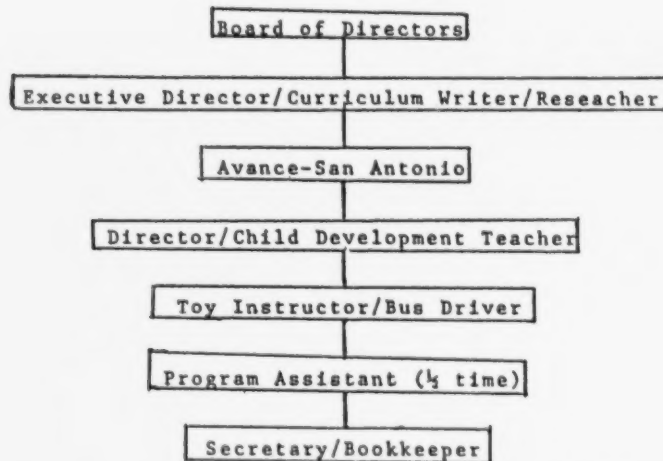
See comparative organizational charts

8) Expansion of facilities, locations and clients. Initially Avance was housed in 2 --three bedroom apartments. Avance is now located in three San Antonio communities 1) in six three-bedroom apartments in the Mirasol Housing Project 2) in a house located adjacent to a low income housing complex in the Southside 3) and a large wing in a City-owned building called the West End Multi-Service Center. Clients have increased from 58 in 1973 to 1300 in 1984.

COMPARATIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CHARTS
 AVANCE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN
 1973 and 1984

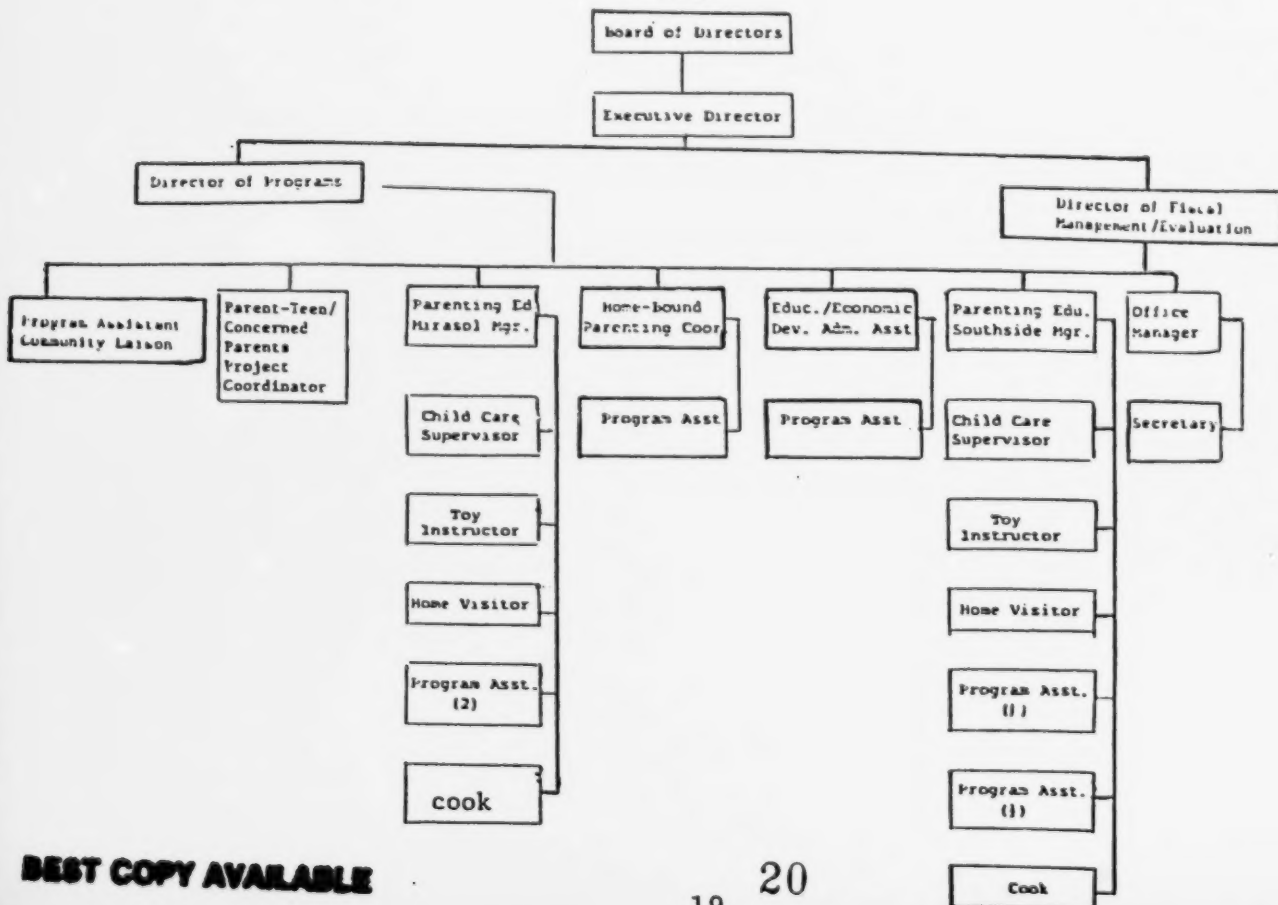
AVANCE NEIGHBORHOOD INTERVENTION PROGRAM

1973



AVANCE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

1984



9) Name changed from Avance Parent-Child Education Programs to Avance Educational Programs for Parents and Children to incorporate all programs in support of families administered by Avance San Antonio, Inc.

10) Programs were added to the existing organization to better address the needs of the community. Avance went from child focus to family focus. Slogans used are "strength of the community through the strength of the family," and "from the cradle to the job." The author and staff came to the realization that the social and economic problems are interrelated; usually if one finds a drop out problem one may also find child abuse, crime, poverty, spouse abuse, etc. In addition, the root of most of these problems lie in a dysfunctional family who is in great need of assistance and support.

Another reason for expanding services to children who are beyond three years of age was the realization that as the child grows so must the parent in new knowledge and continued support (especially during the critical period of preadolescence and adolescence).

Avance became an active participant and advocate of community development. With leadership emerging from within the community, a group of parents, assisted by Avance, obtained a \$100,000 Community Development Block Grant to construct a park in the Mirasol Housing Project.

Rather than the sole focus being on prevention, the organization felt compelled to address the treatment of abusing parents, to prevent further abuse. Therefore, a contract with the Texas Depart-

ment of Human Services was received to serve 15 court mandated child abuse cases.

Avance was initially a community-based organization serving only participants in the catchment area. Today Avance serves a percentage of the clients from outside of the community. Teenage parents from a local high school are bussed to the Avance Southside center; deaf clients from throughout the city and parents of down syndrome children attend the Westside Avance center; Avance receives referrals from the Texas Department of Human Services and other organizations such as the Brady Green High Risk Clinic.

The research findings of Project CAN Prevent clearly demonstrated the need to address the economic conditions of the families through education and training. Consequently, today we have 39 women attending college classes, 55 attending GED, and 49 ESL (English as a Second Language).

VII. Leadership in the field of Parenting Education

Avance was the first parenting program in San Antonio and it has continued to be at the forefront in the parenting education movement locally as well as nationally.

A. Programs, Conferences and Materials Development

Avance co-sponsored a National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect with the Texas Migrant Council; two Statewide Conferences on Family Support with the National Family Resource Coalition and held a Teen Forum entitled "Role Models for Success".

Avance staff are represented and have assumed leadership positions in local and national organizations in the field.

Avance received three federal demonstration grants, designating

it a model in the prevention of child abuse and neglect and teenage pregnancy prevention.

In 1984, Avance had a contract with the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse to provide training to SCAN , Stop Child Abuse and Neglect, in Laredo, Texas. SCAN was successful in obtaining a grant from United Way and the County government to continue the program beyond the Avance training.

The Avance administrative staff, which includes Gloria G. Rodriguez, Carmen P. Cortez and Mercedes Perez de Colon, were primarily instrumental in the conceptual development, supervision and implementation of the various programs and activities. Julia Garza, Sylvia Garcia, Elizabeth Lopez, Maricela Grun (all with degrees), Rita San Miguel, Irene Vidal and Janie Rubio, (Avance graduates) all did an excellent job in managing their respective programs and providing input in the organizations growth and development. The Avance Board of Directors has always assisted and provided the necessary moral support to the staff. There have been several outstanding Board members who have gone beyond the call of duty and helped change the course of events for the agency. The administrative staff also was extensively involved in the development of the following manuscripts:

- 1) the Avance Project CAN Research Report which formally evaluates the effectiveness of the parenting program.
- 2) Avance curriculum modules
3. A Socio-Demographic Profile of San Antonio for Target '90
- 4) Avance Toymaking Manual (Irene Vidal, an Avance graduate, was the illustrator)
- 5) The Avance Evaluation Report

B. Dissemination/Public Relations - Avance has also been included in publications by:

- 1) National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, Chicago, Illinois
- 2) Texas Migrant Council, Laredo, Texas
- 3) Harvard Family Research Project
- 4) Family Resource Coalition, Evanston, Illinois
- 5) Yale University Bush Center: Programs to Strengthen Families
- 6) United Press
- 7) Human Development News by Office of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C.
- 8) Nosotros Magazine
- 9) Southwest Airlines Magazine
- 10) Our Lady of the Lake Magazine
- 11) San Antonio Homes and Garden
- 12) Local printed and electronic media

C. Awards, Recognition and Accomplishments

Avance has been recognized for outstanding work in the field of parent education in the following manner:

- 1) Received the Mental Health Association Award for "Outstanding Mental Health Program" in the San Antonio community
- 2) Executive Director was selected as the San Antonio Light "Woman of the Year" and was inducted into the San Antonio Women's Hall of Fame.
- 3) The Executive Director served as chair for the Family Task Force for Target '90 and on the National Executive Board of the Family Resource Coalition.
- 4) Two Avance graduates were represented in two of the top five

awards for "Outstanding Working Women" in the Odyssey '85 Conference.

5) First Avance graduate received a B.A. degree in Education in 1985 and is now a school teacher.

6) The Executive Director received a Citation from the City Council for Outstanding Work in the Community.

7) Three of Avance's administrators were selected into Leadership San Antonio, sponsored by the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.

8) The Executive Director was selected as charter member of the "100 Club", women's leadership group.

9) The Executive Director was asked to present testimony to the U.S. House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families in the area of child care.

10) The Executive Director was on the National Advisory Board in the development of the federal manual entitled, "Parent's Guide in the Selection of Child Care".

11) The Executive Director participated in a) the White House Conference on Families b) Parents Magazine Advisory Board c) Wingspread II Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect d) The Carnegie Corporation meeting on Self-Help Groups and Social Support Networks: Implications for Prevention of Damage to Children.

12) Carmen Cortez served as a) the State Coordinator for the Texas Family Resource Coalition and is on the Executive Board of the National Task Force on the Hispanic Family c) Chairman of the Parenting Task Force, for the Coalition for Children, Youth , and Families

13) Mercedes Perez de Colon has been on the San Antonio Coalition for Children, Youth and Families Board since 1980 and has served on the Executive Board and is on the San Antonio Planned Parenthood Board.

14) Julia Garza serves on the TACSAP (Texas Association Concerned with School Age Parents) Board.

VIII. Funding History

Avance began with a \$100,000 grant from the Zale Foundation to fund both the Parenting Program and the Tutoring Program. The Zale Foundation funded Avance solely from 1973-75 and continued to support the Avance effort with the 30% matching funds for the primary provider which was the State Department of Human Services from 1975-1978. In 1978, Texas Department of Human Services continued to provide 70% of the funds and the City of San Antonio replaced the Zale Foundation in providing the 30% match. The funding status remained stable for four years. In 1979, TDHS funds were eliminated for the parenting program and new monies from that institution were obtained for the Economic Development Program and the Homebound Child Abuse Project. The City of San Antonio's Human Services Department and United Way funded the Parenting Program in 1979.

The 3½ year grant for Project CAN Prevent funded by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect in 1979 was a turning point in the growth and future of the agency. Carmen Cortez wrote the proposal which was one of over 300 submitted and one of nine selected. Through the grant, the organization gained credibility

through a formal evaluation of the needs of the community and the effectiveness of the Avance services.

In 1983 Avance received a 3 year grant from COSSMHO, entitled "Concerned Parents National Demonstration Project," as a demonstration program in the prevention of teenage pregnancy among the Hispanic youth. In 1984, Avance was again the recipient of another federal grant working directly with the teenagers. Avance has been able to not only survive but to flourish - at a time when many social programs were affected by the massive federal budget cuts. It has not been easy. It meant that the Avance staff, parents and Board had to:

- 1) work harder and longer
- 2) be creative in obtaining additional funding
 - a) parents raised approximately \$3,000 in King and Queen contests and other activities
 - b) Board and staff held two major Gala fundraisers for the establishment of an Endowment Fund, netting approximately \$30,000 on each event
 - c) Staff raised funds selling "gorditas" at different city festivals
 - d) Avance received contributions from Foundations, and women's organizations
 - e) Staff wrote proposals to federal government sources.
- 3) Become more resourceful
 - a) tapped on existing resources such as Community colleges to offer satellite classes at Avance

- b) got free and reduced rental space from the City
 - c) coordinated with community organizations in the area of economic development
 - d) modified the toys once again to reduce cost of materials
 - e) had parents volunteer more in service delivery
 - f) had three video productions on Avance, a bus, a computer, furniture, etc. donated from the private sector
 - g) had excellent P.R. on services and needs
- 4) Reorganized the staff structure

Instead of having 2 center managers with Masters Degrees heading each of the parenting programs, the Child Development Teachers assumed the role of center managers, in addition to their teaching duties.

In 1985, two Avance graduates, who had been with the Agency for 9 and 11 years respectively, were promoted to Center Manager Trainees. One Center Manager with a degree became Education Specialist providing the needed training and supervision of both centers.

The two staff members with Masters degree, Carmen Cortez and Mercedes Perez de Colon, became Director of Programs and Director of Fiscal Management and Evaluation respectively. This enabled the program to grow from a small grass-roots agency to a large comprehensive and efficiently managed organization.

Funding for social services, especially for the low-income, is never sufficient and one cannot ever be assured of its continuation from year to year. It takes a combination of private monies, city, state, national grants and local private community monies to main-

tain the extremely important effort which for many has been the lifeline in the community and the hope for a better tomorrow. Until poverty and all its debilitating conditions are eliminated, the search for various sources of funding should be an on-going activity. It is important that social service programs receive the support needed to grow in order to survive and to better respond to the needs of the community - in this manner the community and society stand to benefit.

IX. Characteristics of a Successful Parenting Program

The key to a successful parenting program is the people who provide the services and those who manage the organization. The following are ideal characteristics that one should strive for. Employees of social service organizations must be extremely sensitive and caring individuals. Their humanistic nature must demonstrate that they are empathetic, patient, committed, and interested in the welfare of the client and in the quality of life of the community. They must be creative, resourceful, courageous, confident, demonstrative and extremely optimistic. They should be stable, competent, reliable, dependable, hard working, willing to learn new skills and be good organizers. They need to be both a leader and a follower and be able to work as part of a team.

When there are peaks in the workload - when special projects need to be accomplished, they must willingly contribute to its completion and success. It is imperative that staff members receive continuous training and feedback on what is expected - this is especially true for the individuals from the community who have never before been employed. In addition, a personal effort must be made to make each employee feel appreciated and important. Birthdays, holidays, and new births are celebrated at Avance. Lastly, they must be representative of the population they serve, the majority being from the same ethnic group, speaking the same language and coming from the same neighborhood. Key leaders of

the community, those who seem to know everyone and who are more active or have the potential to be, should be hired as staff members.

The Executive Director must assume the leadership role, leading the staff to accomplish the desired goals, encouraging and supporting his/her colleagues in being creative, resourceful, and contributing members of the team. He/She must be fully committed to the philosophy of the organization and serve as an inspiration and a role model. The Executive Director should possess the following characteristics: be dynamic, competent, with endless energy, creative, extremely sensitive and humanistic, resourceful and determined. It is important that he/she possess the following skills in management, leadership, organization, public relations, and politics. He/She must be persuasive, eager to learn and grow, have stamina, resiliency, courage, vision and intuitive perception. Even though the author is the Executive Director and strives to live up to these ideals, it is not her intention to project that she possesses all of these characteristics.

It is crucial that the administrative staff be involved in various local and national initiatives and organizations not only to further the field but to meet people who may be deciding on or supporting the future funding or fundraising effort of the organization.

Staff must also make parents feel important, secure, good about themselves, that they belong and are significant members of the

organization and the community. The parents need to realize that they have a great deal of untapped potential; a sense of control and empowerment over their lives their children's future, and over the quality of life in their community.

Staff needs to have parents feel they have succeeded by giving constant praise, recognition and reinforcement. They need to receive immediate personal gratification. Because they feel proud of their accomplishments they will be more motivated to teach their children as many skills and concepts as possible. They will be able to compare their child's development and performance (for example in language and motor skills) to other children and realize that they were the cause of the difference. That will make them feel good and give them the necessary courage and confidence to help themselves. The fact that they persevered throughout the ten-month parenting program and getting (for the first time for many) a graduation certificate and ring gives them a great sense of pride and the realization that rewards come after persistence and hard work. Ultimately, parents may succeed at obtaining their GED, driver's license, skills training courses, college classes and eventually employment.

The services need to be community-based, responsive to the needs of the people, comprehensive in scope and preferably preventive in nature. The services also need to be consistent, predictable and with structure. Volunteers are needed to support the staff but never to replace it- unless, however, it is an individual

who is dependable, who will always be there, and who possesses the desired employee characteristics previously mentioned. Transportation and day care are vital to the success of the program. The curriculum should take a holistic approach, helping participants acquire new knowledge, skills and attitudes. One should establish, increase and strengthen the informal social support network of the clients for material and emotional assistance and for recreation. This support mechanism provides sanctions and reinforcement by important others. There also needs to be extensive outreach and followup.

The center should be a place where people can feel free to share their experiences and be allowed to ventilate on a one-to-one basis and/or group setting.

The programs need to take a sequential order, so that, first, the family situation is stabilized, personal development can then be pursued, ultimately leading the parent and child to obtaining and maintaining a job.

In addition, the organization needs to have adequate, secure, stable funding. It is recommended that the organization move toward self-sufficiency or to obtain a variety of funding so that if one funding source dries up, the organization won't close its doors.

The board of directors sets policy, and it is up to the executive director to carry it out. Ideally, the board should ethnically reflect the population being served and should represent various fields of expertise which can help the organization such as business, accounting, law, health, public/community relations, personal management, education, and representation from the community.

The Executive Director is the strategic planner, forever

thinking of ways to effectively and efficiently accomplish the goals of the organization. The writer has compared the organization to an automobile: each part is important and must be working well. The car cannot start unless each part is functioning well. The Executive Director is the driver who determines where the car is going and how hard to step on the accelerator. She is also responsible that the outward appearance of the vehicle is presentable to the public at all times.

X. The Future Direction of Avance

The future direction of Avance will be 1) to continue providing a comprehensive array of services which strengthen and support the family unit 2) to concentrate efforts on research development and evaluation 3) to provide technical assistance and training 4) to replicate the Avance Parent-Child Education model in other sites throughout the nation 5) to be self sufficient 6) to continue to play a prominent role in the parenting/family support movement.

Avance will continue to be responsive to the needs of the community by continually performing a needs assessment of the population. It will attempt to 1) provide services to fathers and the larger community 2) secure funding for preadolescent and adolescent programs 3) and sponsor city-wide workshops.

It is the hope of the author that leadership and qualified individuals can emerge from within the low income communities that it serves to assume the service delivery and administrative roles.

These leaders may stay or leave the community in which they were reared. But just as the author, they will wholeheartedly again initiate the cycle of developing new leadership and personal growth of others in that community and continue to offer an opportunity for advancement.